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SUBJECT: IIP LEADERSHIP IN BASRAH SAYS SECURITY HAS IMPROVED FOR SUNNIS

REF: BASRAH 105

CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Regional Coordinator, REO Basrah,
Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) On October 26, the RC and poloff met with Haji Khalaf Mohammad Abid al-Mawla, parliamentarian and former head of the IIP in Basrah, and Sheik Abdul Karim Jurad al-Dosari, acting IIP head. Haji Khalaf was upbeat during the meeting and told the RC that the security situation for Sunnis in Basrah has improved substantially since his last meeting with the RC in June (reftel). During that meeting, Haji Khalaf catalogued cases of intimidation and assassinations aimed at Sunnis and told the RC that Sunni clerics were contemplating issuing a fatwa ordering all Sunnis to leave Basrah. According to Haji Khalaf, 2,500 families fled Basrah because of the violence, but 60 percent of them have returned and "the rest are contemplating returning." He noted that the Basrah office of the IIP recently re-opened. (Note: It was attacked and torched in the immediate aftermath of the bombing of the Golden Mosque in February. End Note.) Haji Khalaf credited Major General Abdul Huddah, a member of Prime Minister Maliki's security committee in Basrah, for putting pressure on the Iraqi security forces to help effect changes that led to more security for the Sunni community.

¶2. (C) Haji Khalaf and Sheik Abdul Kariem both complained that some detainees held by Coalition Forces should be released or turned over to the Iraqi justice system and those prisoners being held without evidence should be released. Haji Khalaf told the RC that Coalition detainment facilities were functioning as schools for terrorists and served to subvert young men. Sheik Abdul Karim told the RC that a committee made up of both Sunnis and Shias should be constituted that would look at the issue of detainees and work with Coalition Forces to resolve the simple or easy cases.

¶3. (C) Comment: Haji Khalaf was much more positive in this assessment of the security situation for Sunnis in Basrah. Although most Sunni contacts report that Sunnis are returning to Basrah, Haji Khalaf was the first to associate their homecoming with improved security. Other REO contacts reported previously that Sunni families came back to Basrah as a last resort - they could not find employment or faced violence in their new homes. Haji Khalaf stated quite simply that for the Sunnis in Basrah, security is THE issue. Essential services, employment, etc., are all secondary to their desire to be able to live in peace in their homes in Basrah. He did say that many of the returnees could not reclaim their former employment or return to school. If more Sunnis return and face the dilemma of unemployment, the initial sense of relief that they are able to come home may change into a more hardened demand for more assistance from the community. Besides his humanitarian concerns, as a politician Haji Khalaf is quite naturally pleased to see the return of Sunnis since they are his voting constituency. End Comment.

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